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New Zealand

Biotechnology

Australia New Zealand Food Authority Approves GM Labeling Requirements 2000

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Report Highlights: New Zealand's Ministry of Health has announced that mandatory labelling of genetically modified foods, where introduced DNA or protein is present in the final food, will come into force on December 7, 2001. Labelling will be required for any GM food imports and any domestic foods. The Australia New Zealand Food Authority made the announcement in early December following the gazettal of amendments to Standard A18 of the Food Standards Code - Food produced using gene technology.

Includes PSD changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Unscheduled Report
Wellington [NZ1], NZ

New Zealand's Ministry of Health has stated that mandatory labelling of genetically modified foods, where introduced DNA or protein is present in the final food, will come into force on December 7, 2001. The Australia New Zealand Food Authority made the announcement in early December following the gazettal of amendments to Standard A18 of the Food Standards Code - Food produced using gene technology. (A 12-month period is allowed for businesses to comply).

Agreement between New Zealand and Australian federal and state health ministers to label all genetically modified foods was made at a meeting in July. The amended standard was reportedly a response to consumer concerns about genetically modified foods and their desire for more information. Under the amended standard, food or ingredients labelled "genetically modified" either contains new genetic material or protein as a result of the genetic modification or has altered characteristics - such as changed nutritional values.

For the purpose of the standard **genetically modified food** means food which is, or contains as an ingredient, including a processing aid, a food produced using gene technology which -

- contains novel DNA and/or novel protein; or
- has altered characteristics;

but does not include -

- highly refined food, other than that with altered characteristics, where the effect of the refining process is to remove novel DNA and/or novel protein;
- a processing aid or food additive, except where novel DNA and/or novel protein from the processing aid or food additive remains present in the food to which it has been added;
- flavours present in the food in a concentration no more than 1g/kg (0.1%); or
- a food, ingredient, or processing aid in which genetically modified food is unintentionally present in a quantity no more than 10g/kg (1%) per ingredient.

Altered characteristics means any of the following matters:

- the genetic modification has resulted in one or more significant composition or nutritional parameters having values outside the normal range of values for existing counterpart food not produced using gene technology;
- the level of anti-nutritional factors or natural toxicants are significantly different in comparison to the existing counterpart food not produced using gene technology;
- the food produced using gene technology contains a new factor known to cause an allergic response in particular sections of the population;
- the intended use of the food produced using gene technology is different to the existing counterpart food not produced using gene technology; or
- the genetic modification raises significant ethical, cultural and religious concerns regarding the origin of the genetic material used in the genetic modification.

Novel DNA and/or novel protein means DNA or a protein which, as a result of the use of gene technology, is different in chemical sequence or structure from DNA or protein present in counterpart food which has not been produced using gene technology.

Any statement required by clause 5 may be contained in the statement of ingredients where the genetically modified food is an ingredient or processing aid.

Where genetically modified food is displayed for retail sale other than in a package, any information that would have been required under clause 5 of this Standard on the label on or attached to the food if it was packaged, must be displayed on or in connection with the display of the food.

This Standard does not apply to food intended for immediate consumption which is prepared and sold from food premises and vending vehicles, including restaurants, take away outlets, caterers, or self-catering institutions.

To meet the new requirement, food businesses such as manufacturers, packers, importers and retailers must take all reasonable steps to:

- find out if their food is GM or has a GM ingredient - this includes additives and processing aids;
- find out if the GM food or ingredient is approved by ANZFA; and
- determine what the labelling requirements are for the food.

The food business applying the food label or relabelling food to meet the Standard's requirement (e.g. a food importer) has the primary responsibility for ensuring the accuracy of the label. There is a requirement under Australian and New Zealand food legislation for businesses to exercise due diligence in complying with food standards. The best way to meet these obligations is for businesses to use a paper or audit trail similar to a quality assurance system or testing for novel DNA or protein.

CLAUSE 5. Labelling Format of Genetically Modified Food

The label on or attached to a package of genetically modified food must include the statement "genetically modified" in conjunction with the name of that food or ingredient or processing aid.

Example for single ingredient genetically modified foods:

Soy Flour
Genetically Modified

Soy Flour
From genetically modified soya beans

Example for genetically modified food ingredients:

Ingredients: Soy Protein Isolate (genetically modified), Maltodextrin, Vegetable Oil: Food Acid (332), Emulsifier (471), Vegetable Gum (407), Water Added.

Note: The label on or attached to a package of food which is not defined as "genetically modified" food in the standard is not required to include any statement about the generic status of the food.

More information can be obtained by visiting the ANZFA website at www.anzfa.govt.nz

A compliance guide to assist businesses in complying with the new labeling requirements is also available from the ANZFA website.